RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

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Persian

فارسی

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Persian Speakers

- 39 Million Native Speakers Worldwide
- In US: 283,255 Iranian-born (2000 Census)
- In RI 485 of Iranian descent, but considered underrepresented in 2000 US Census (National Iranian American Council, Iran Census Report, 2003)
- Iran's official language: common in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India & Southern Russia

Persian or Farsi?
The debate continues…

- Farsi is the local name of the Persian language in Iran
- First used by Westerners in the mid-20th century
- For some, its a political statement and others it indicates a lack of knowledge about the history of the language
- The Academy of Persian Language and Literature says, "Persian is more appropriate as it has the longer tradition in the western languages and better expresses the role of the language as a mark of cultural and national continuity."

Image Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian_national_flag1_%28tehran%29.jpg

Persian or Farsi?

- Why is this important?
  - If it matters to the learner, then it should matter to us because the debate can be heated
- Opposing view to previous slide, preferring “Farsi”: “When I choose to tell people that I am Iranian and speak Farsi it is for a reason. It is an attempt at defining myself in my own terms…”
- Still others do not see the use of Farsi over Persian as political or tied to their identity

Image Source:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Iranian_national_flag1_%28tehran%29.jpg

The Persian Language

- Phonology:
  - 11 vowels & diphthongs (E=22), no tense v. lax vowels
  - 32 consonants (E=24); no clusters in single syllables
  - 5 English consonant sounds without equivalent Persian
- Prosodics:
  - Stress generally falls on word's final syllable
  - No reduced vowel equivalent
- 32 character alphabet written in Arabic script, R to L
- Grammar: word order, time & tense, articles, gender & #

The Trouble with English: Phonology

- Issues Common to Consonant Sounds:
  - Substitute ‘v’ for ‘w’, no dark ‘-l’: *feel* , ‘-r’ as trill
  - Distinguishing ‘–th’: *thin* v. *this*; generally substitute ‘–t’ for **th**in (sometimes for **th**is, too)
  - Ending ‘-ng’ pronounced as 2 separate phonemes
- Add vowel(s) to break up consonant clusters:
  - ‘p***e***rice’ for price
  - ‘***e***st***e***riaght’ for straight
  - ‘warm***e***th’ for warmth

The Trouble with English: Phonology

- English has 22 Vowels and Diphthongs (Persian, 11)
- Difficulty perceiving & articulating full range of vowels:
  - sh**ee**p for sh**i**p, an example of lax v. tense
  - confusing sounds b**e**d for b**a**d and c**a**rt for c**u**t
- Problems related to rhythmic differences when:
  - Final syllable stress alters meaning of word
  - Producing stress on non-final syllables of E words
  - Syllable timing, no reduced vowel equivalent to schwa & stress on final syllable lead to differences

Persian English Language Learners

- Unfamiliar Latin alphabet
- Word order:
  - Adjectives always follow nouns
  - Verbs are usually at the end of a sentence
- No equivalent to ‘do’ : *“When you come to RI?”*
- Simple past in Persian = simple & present perfect in E
- Definite & indefinite articles: no Persian equivalent as suffixes are added to nouns to indicate in/definite
- No s/he gender distinction, single pronoun used for both
- Persian nouns do not take plural form when used with #s

Cross Cultural Considerations

- Most Persian speakers will be Iranian (Swan & Smith 2001)
  - View teacher as authoritarian figure
  - Extremely formal education system emphasizing literary language and rote learning; may view communicative methods as less serious or lesser form of instruction
- Acceptable in conversation:
  - Broad hand gestures and loud speech
  - Lack of eye contact between men and women
  - Close proximity to each other, more so than is typical in US
- Touching, cheek kissing in greetings among same gender, not between man and to woman

Cross Cultural Communication

- Pragmatic Competence (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005)
  - Apologies – more intense, 'shame' mentioned prominently
  - Ritual – *taarof* - of making and refusing offers related to food and drink, suggestions and gift-giving, etc. contrasts with lack of ritual formality in US
  - The more forceful and direct the offer, the more polite it is while in US may be deemed as pushy or combative
  - What may be common in US between genders seen as having sexual connotations in Iran: man complimenting woman's appearance or even making small talk

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